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seem that a complete bibliography of the *Chanson de Roland* should include a section devoted to a subject which has been treated by Suchier, Tiersot, and others.

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The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery. Translated from the German of Karl Werder by ELIZABETH WILDER, with an Introduction by W. J. ROLFE. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907. Pp. 223.

The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery contains only some of Professor Karl Werder's lectures on *Hamlet* as the original lectures in German were so comprehensive as to contain a digest of all notable German criticism of the play. As the translation stands we have the prosaic, but extremely interesting, presentation of Werder's theory. For the first time this theory is presented in full to English readers, and hence we are privileged to reconsider the vexatious question of the mystery of *Hamlet* in the light of this new material.

Hamlet has never been a popular play for reading and study in the secondary schools. On the other hand *Hamlet* has interested Shakespearean critics more than any other play by Shakespeare. Does the cause of its unpopularity in secondary schools—the difficulty of understanding the character of *Hamlet*—explain its popularity with the critics? Do the metaphysical distinctions with which the critics have blanketed *Hamlet's* character smother the interest and the vision of the play for the youthful reader? Is it possible that a reasonably fair, intelligent, and unphilosophical explanation of the mystery of *Hamlet* would make that play as popular as *Macbeth*? There is no reason why *Hamlet* should not be popular with the youthful reader; it should certainly appeal to his sense for the sensational with its eight deaths, the violation of the seventh commandment, a ghost, a mad woman who commits suicide, and a fight in a grave. But when we consider the character of the chief figure that is woven into this fearful web of life and death the whole situation is changed. The otherwise black pall is variegated with one of the most complex, most interesting, and withal one of the most human characters portrayed in literature. Then the question arises for both the youth and the learned critic: "Why did not *Hamlet* obey the command of the ghost and save the carnival of death, and give peace to his fretful soul." There's the rub. So while the youth has passed by the play, the critics have waged war in trying to answer the question.

In attempting to pluck out the heart of *Hamlet's* mystery the critics have ranged from the proverbially sublime to the ridiculous. *Hamlet* has been considered the sanest and the insanest of men; he has been conceived as a woman in disguise in love with Horatio; he has been labeled as a young man who wanted to oust his uncle and "faked" the ghost story to assist his purpose; he has been explained as inactive because of the impediment of fat—"He's fat and scant of breath," and so on from sane to absolutely insane explanations. A brief summary of the more important sane conceptions of *Hamlet's* character may be permissible before we weigh the book under review.

By reducing all criticism on *Hamlet* to the final analysis we can divide the critics into two classes: first, those who assert that *Hamlet's* inability to obey the ghost arises from an internal or subjective cause; and, secondly, those

who champion the idea that his inactivity is accounted for by an external or objective cause. Illustrious names are in both schools. Goethe and Coleridge lead the critics of the first kind, the so-called sentimental and intellectual theorists, the philosophical empiricists; Werder, Klein, Rolfe, Hudson are some of the eminent critics who support the objective plea—they may be called (in order to balance our hypothetical antithesis) the rationalistic school—those who go by “facts.”

One division of the tender-minded school, those who are guided by idealistic and optimistic tendencies, asserts that Hamlet was restrained by conscience or moral scruples; or to put the same theory in a more subtle and elusive phraseology, the adherents of this division say that in the innermost depths of Hamlet's soul, unknown to him in concrete terms of conscience or argument, lay a moral repugnance to the deed, a conscience that, although unvoiced, unrecognized, and unrevealed, is nevertheless, saluted by the various self-accusations of cowardice, passion, sloth, and various other common human disabilities and infirmities. Headed by the name of Goethe this theory has held its ground for over a century.

Another theory of the subjective school was initiated by Coleridge, and sanctioned by Schlegel, Dowden, and Taine among other giants of criticism. This theory explains Hamlet's inability to act to his excessive tendency to reflection. It is a satisfying theory, bears its burden well, and has many plausible arguments to support it.

In close relation to the foregoing theories is the theory which explains Hamlet's inactivity as the result of a profound melancholy emanating from excessive reflection on the required task or from the intense emotional nature of the man. Here we have a resultant theory based upon the subjective idea, and closely related to both the emotional or conscience theories, and to the theory of Coleridge, and, moreover, it tends to have a tangent relationship to the old insanity plea which was supported by Hudson in his first edition of *Hamlet*. The theory requires fine distinctions and metaphysical aid to make it proof-tight. Loening the German, and Bradley the English critic, are, we believe, its most able critics.

For the most part the theories given above have had their day, but they have not ceased to exert their influence. Another theory now seems to be gaining ground—the theory generally known as the Klein-Werder theory, and best exposed by Professor Werder. The earliest distinct statement of this theory was made by J. L. Klein, in the *Berliner Modenspiegel* in 1846. In the winter term of 1859-60 Professor Karl Werder, at the University of Berlin, who had not then seen Klein's thesis, delivered his lectures on Hamlet, and repeated them in 1871-72. These lectures were first published in Germany in 1875, and again in 1893, the year of Werder's death. Now, nearly fifty years after their first hearing, they are translated, in part, into English. No better evidence is needed that Werder's theory has vitality and originality.

Werder introduces his thesis with the statement that the critics have been so absorbed in the study of Hamlet's character that the task imposed upon him has been lost sight of. This, he says, is the fundamental mistake. In answering the question, what is Hamlet to do? Werder argues that it is not to crush the king at once, but to bring him to confession, to unmask and convict

him, to obtain not only revenge, but punishment. The monarchy is elective, and hence the king holds the throne by legal right. Consequently any other course would defeat justice and "doom truth to oblivion." In view of this fact Hamlet must protect and preserve his own life in hope that both he and Claudius will live until the truth can be disclosed. No punishment can be inflicted on the king by Hamlet except punishment which will be justified by the opinion of his world. Werder insists that the Ghost does not concern himself with the crown or even with the government, but only with the violation of the family unity. "Therefore," says Werder, "Hamlet does not aim at the crown nor is it his first duty to kill the king; but his task is justly to punish the murderer of his father, unassailable as that murderer now appears in the eyes of the world, and to satisfy the Danes of the righteousness of his action. That is Hamlet's task."

Werder then proceeds with commendatory Teutonic thoroughness to analyze the reasons why Hamlet was prevented from carrying out his plan to expose the corrupt king. With no proof except the word of the ghost he had to wait for substantial if not circumstantial evidence for any deed he might engage to do. Then came the play-actors whom Hamlet engages to play before the king hoping thereby that Claudius would reveal his guilt before the whole court. The king, however, does not do so. Then unfortunately Hamlet kills Polonius, and is dispatched to England—with his own consent. Hamlet discovers the treachery of the king, makes his way back to Denmark to unmask the evil-minded king, only to be done to death by Laertes. The king, though he never confesses, reveals his villainy to Laertes, and unwittingly brings about the catastrophe which results in his degradation and his death.

In brief, the play is not the hero nor the character, but the action. All hinges upon Hamlet's ability to protect and to preserve his own life. Everything is against him, externally, and every step seems to be a false step that strengthens the cord of fate about him. Were it not for these objective difficulties, plus the hand of fate, Hamlet would have been successful.

Much can be said against this theory; we are still of the opinion that there are "points in Hamlet's soul unseized by the Germans yet," but, as Professor Tolman says, "It is the most important theory of the drama that has been put forward in recent years," and "it exalts and ennobles our conception of Hamlet's character." Professor Tolman, who does not, however, accept Werder's theory in its entirety adds: "All the familiar charges against him fall to the ground. The Prince whom we all love and pity now claims our unqualified admiration. As good and wise as he is ill-fated, he stands forth almost without 'spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.' The drama becomes a tragedy of fate, not a tragedy of character."

Our purpose in writing this article will have been fulfilled if teachers of English in secondary schools will read this book. The excellent introduction by Dr. Rolfe is a masterpiece in itself, and the Werder theory is good mental meat for any lover of Hamlet. If the reading of the book clears up many dark places in the teacher's mind, and enables him to place *Hamlet* before his classes with reasonable clearness and interest, then this *résumé* of criticism on Hamlet will have more than served its purpose.

H. E. COBLENTZ

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